

RAMPTOWN LOCATION EVIDENCE (compiled 2/25/2014)

(James E. Bonine property west of Calvin Center Rd., south of M-60 , Vandalia)

Warren Wooden--April, 2002 (Dowagiac Daily News)

--Virginia Springsteen and her brother, Warren Wooden, pull no punches placing Ramptown in Penn Township. "I was born on that farm. My brother Richard was born there too. We've got dish parts, Nails. We've got some definite evidence." Wooden, who turns 80 next month, lived there seven years. They knew it as the Dugan Farm. Mary Dougan was the oldest daughter of James E. Bonine. When her father died, the remaining four owned all of the Bonine farm, hers was just part of it.

Sondra Mose-Ursery--April 2002 (Dowagiac Daily News)

--Former Vandalia village president Sondra Mose-Ursery said of Ramptown's location. "I know it was in between M-60 and Brownsville St. off Calvin Center Rd. Deep in my heart I know it's there. It seems like there were a lot of little settlements of cabins of African Americans here in Cass County".

Jean Schmidt--February, 1981 (The Daily Star, Niles)

--an avid history buff, is a descendant of Isaac Bonine. Bonine's son, James, was the family member most noted for giving blacks an opportunity to earn a living, she said. "James Bonine gave blacks an acre of land to farm and live on. In return they would clear his land. It was like a tenant farming situation. They called it Ramptown. Each runaway or black would get one acre for 10 years in Ramptown. Many saved enough money from their start in Ramptown to buy land of their own".

Virginia Springsteen

--Springsteen places Ramptown west of Calvin Center Rd and south of M-60, across from where Bonine Street ends. (2009 Cassopolis Vigilant)

--Springsteen was 90 years old in 2002. She grew up on the Dugan farm, formerly known as Ramptown. She identified it to her neighbor Marilyn Fry, president of Cass County Historical Society. She also identified it to the WMU team doing the dig in 2002, and spoke about it with Dr. Veta Tucker

Tobe Harper

--African American farmhand on the Dugan farm in the 1930's told Virginia Springsteen. "That's where Ramptown was. My mother-in-law (Chloe Guess) was born in Ramptown."

Leon Alexander (descendent of Charles Osborn)

--a letter from him in 1964 discussed Ramptown and included a map depicting its location. He says he learned of the location from John. N. Bonine, grandson of James E. Bonine. The map shows the same location offered by Virginia (Wooden) Springsteen (see map)

Nathan Jones (Cassopolis Vigilant)

--claimed to be 109 when he died in the Cass County infirmary in 1923. He said "From James Bonine's corners south into Calvin was an unbroken wilderness dotted here and there with a cabin in a small clearing. The section was called "Ramptown" and I did my share of clearing it."

A.F.Woods

--remembers conversations with "Aunt Melissa" Brown near her home on Brownsville Rd. She explained that Ramptown was where fugitive slaves would live to a while, and that she was born there. Woods claims that the settlement was located on the old property of James Bonine, across from Bonine Street in Penn Township.

Ramptown Location Evidence--James E. Bonine Property p. 2

Clarence Knuth (1963 PhD dissertation UM)

--interviewed Fred Wright, great nephew of James E. Bonine and wrote "Ramptown apparently developed into a tree-shaded cabin settlement of moderate size with a population of approximately 100 individuals and a school for the Negro children."

Dr. Benjamin Wilson (PhD dissertation 1974 MSU)

--"Bonine, a UGRR operator and owner of roughly 1000-1500 acres, convinced many fugitives to settle on his land and work for him. Many took advantage of his offer and a settlement called Ramptown developed on Bonine's property." James E. talked about Ramptown on his deathbed, and indicated that his heirs continue the practical altruism that finally made many self-sufficient". He also interviewed G. Elwood Bonine who said that he tilled up many foundations on the property he owned that was formerly called Ramptown.

Helen Hibberd Windle (The Underground Railroad in Northern Indiana 1939)

--Much of Cass County was cleared by those slaves who were given five acres of land each, a cabin and the right to grow their own crops. One of the queer settlements, called Ramptown, was located on this farm. She mistakenly identifies James E. as his father, Isaac, in citing the 1500 acre Bonine farm.

Sale of Bonine Elk Farm (South Bend Tribune, 1958)

--"One of the queer settlements of fugitive slaves was called "Ramptown" and was a cluster of some 100 Negro cabins on the land which is now the big Bonine farm. There "Aunt Melissa" Brown, aged 80, was born

Harold B. Fields--Free Negroes in Cass County Before the Civil War (MI History Mag 12/1960)

--"Some, no doubt, thought themselves safe from capture when they had come as far as Michigan, and chose to remain here for a time. One settlement of fugitives, known as "Ramptown" was located a mile or so south of Bonine's Corners, in Penn Township, some survivors of which are known to persons still living." (statement of Edgar Probst, Judge of Probate, Cass County, to the writer, September 1958)

Lydia "Rose" Sparks (granddaughter of Lydia Bonine, sister of James E. Bonine)

--in a slide presentation performed at Penn Friends Church in Penn MI July 20, 1980
"...it was originally the home of James Bonine. This farm was also the property on which Ramptown was formed. ...it is located at the northeast corner of Brownsville and Calvin Center Road. Runaway slaves, who came to the Quakers for protection, could have the use of 5 acres of land on which to farm and build shelter. These cabins, constructed of logs were about 12 feet by 20 feet. For many years after the disappearance of the cabin structures, evidence of the cabins existence could be seen. Because the cabins had dirt floors, the composition of the soil in that area was changed, and visible dark areas resulted. Tillage also unearthed bricks and other remnants of the settlement."

First Congregational Church of Detroit--"Michigan Pulses of UGRR and Anti-Slavery Activism"

--internet article states "the Quaker community also assisted those escaping enslavement, by offering temporary use of land and resources in exchange for manual labor. One such settlement, known as "Ramptown" on Young's Prairie, was owned by Quaker James Bonine."

Ramptown Location Evidence--James E. Bonine Property p. 3

Harry East n.d. (probably written around 1937)

--A typed manuscript written by Harry East was intended to be a brief historical sketch of Vandalia. "James E. Bonine cleared a tract of land on his farm in a small colony plan. He offered settlers the use of 10A tracts for 5 years if they would fell the trees to build their cabins and clear their small fields. Many people took advantage of the offer and a settlement with a church, schools and homes grew up in the woods. This was called "Ramptown" from the wild leeks or "ramps" which grew abundantly in the woods."

Benton Harbor News Paladium 1937

--"Aunt Melissa" Brown is the last living person who was born in Ramptown, a cluster of some 100 Negro cabins erected on the present Elwood Bonine farm for fugitive slaves.

South Bend Tribune 1938

--One of the queer settlements of fugitive slaves was called "Ramptown" and was a cluster of some 100 Negro cabins on the land now in the big Bonine Farm. "Aunt Melissa" Brown, now aged 80 years was born there. The parents of Aunt Melissa arrived as fugitives from Carolina to the Ramptown settlement. The cabins were tore down some half century ago.

Mae Schoetzow--A Brief History of Cass County 1935

--first written mention of an oral account of Ramptown, presented by Ms. Esse Dakin in 1889 to the South Bend Historical Society. This work also summarized the early accounts of Ramptown that appeared in the newsprint used by East n.d.

CONCLUSION--The Ramptown Project p. 27

"With the exception of Knuth (who mistakenly placed Ramptown north of M60), all of the sources that specifically mentioned Ramptown's location, coincide, suggesting that property formerly owned by James E. Bonine (son of Isaac Bonine) was the site of Ramptown. To be more specific, three of the sources (oral tradition provided by A.F. Woods, V. Springsteen, and the map drawn by Leon Alexander) suggested that the settlement was located in an agricultural field on the west side of Calvin Center road, one half mile south of M-60".

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS--The Ramptown Project p.70

"Combined with the information from oral accounts, it is likely that sites 20CS142, 20CS143 and 20CS145 represent the remains of domestic households that were occupied by formerly enslaved individuals who identified themselves with the Ramptown community." All these sites are on land owned by James E. Bonine (see schedule p. 61)

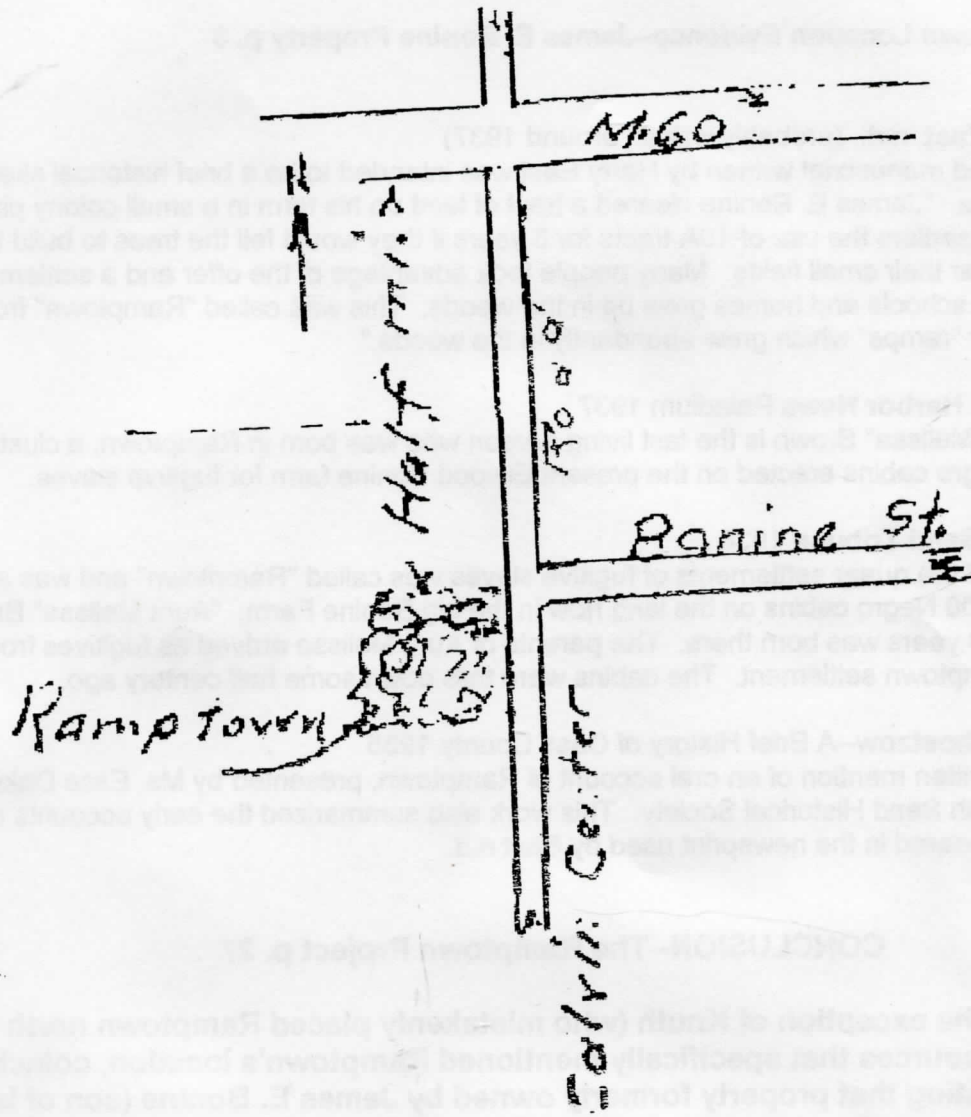


Figure 3.2. Ramptown map by Leon Alexander (1964). From the Mose-Urserly Private Collection (L-02).

Mr. A. F. Woods shared his recollections of personal conversations with Melissa (Gibson) Brown when he was a young man in the 1930s. He also suggested the locations of former cabins associated with the Ramptown settlement in areas where he noticed artifacts while tilling the land. We eventually surveyed some of the more than 500 acres that he owns in Calvin Township.